

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is a Performance Management Program?

A. A Performance Management Program is a systematic process that when followed from start to finish as outlined according to the Performance Management Policy will help create a nurturing performance based culture where each employee's individual performance plan is aligned with the agency's objectives. Through this process, the employee receives meaningful and objective feedback.

Q. What is the purpose of the Performance Management Cycle?

A. Performance Management Cycles are specific periods of time set up to provide a balanced review of an employee's performance as it relates to stated expected performance standards and work outcomes throughout the entire performance review cycle. The review cycle is a specified timeframe for open communication between the employee and supervisor (rater). This communication should happen throughout the review cycle to avoid surprises, not just when the annual performance review is due. Specifically, the annual performance review should be based on the rater's observations and documentation of the employee's performance throughout the review against expected performance standards and work outcome results for the entire performance review cycle.

Q. What has changed from the last Performance Management Program?

A. Several changes have been introduced for this new Performance Management Program:

- a. The Performance Evaluation Program is now being referred to as the Performance Management Program,
- b. New changes in verbiage are being implemented (i.e. individual performance plan instead of job plan in order to focus attention on the employee's work outcomes),
- c. New anchor point rating scale definitions have been introduced: unacceptable, marginal, valued, advanced, and outstanding,
- d. New ways of recording performance have been introduced for all employees, including new tools and forms,
- e. Dates for the standard performance review cycle are now October 1st through September 30th of the following year (for the cycle beginning 2013, the cycle will begin on November 1st to allow for management training),
- f. Ratings are not provided or documented during the interim review discussions,
- g. Reviewers will approve all interim reviews prior to the discussion with the employee,
- h. The Appointing Authority (AA) role is only required to approve annual, probationary or probationary-flex performance reviews that have been rated

unacceptable or outstanding. However, the AA may choose to review and approve all performance reviews,

Click on the following link for more information about the changes above:

<http://www.tn.gov/dohr/ogc-er/performance/perform.shtml>

Q. What has not changed from the last Performance Management Program?

- A.** There are many factors that have not changed over the last several years:
- a. Raters still conduct discussions regarding the individual performance plan (IPP), two interim reviews and an annual review with their employees,
 - b. We will continue to use a rating scale with five defined anchor points. However, the anchor point definitions have changed.

Many changes for the Performance Management Program were implemented during the cycle between July 1, 2012, and July 31, 2013. Some of the changes during this time period included:

- a. All executive service employees were added to the program,
- b. Performance plans had to be written using the S.M.A.R.T. formula,
- c. Performance plans included 4 to 6 of the most important work outcomes for the employee
- d. Work outcomes were written at the mid-point of the rating scale which is the expected level of performance
- e. Work outcomes had to be ranked from most to least important.

Q. What is the timeframe of the 2013 – 2014 standard performance review cycle?

A. The review cycle should cover performance related to the current individual performance plan for the period of November 1, 2013, through September 30, 2014. However, keep in mind that all non-probationary employees must have a completed performance plan no later than December 15, 2013.

Q. When does the standard performance review cycle begin?

A. The standard performance review cycle for 2013-2014 begins with the performance planning phase which starts November 1, 2013. Subsequent review cycles will begin October 1 of each year.

Q. When does the standard performance review cycle end?

A. The standard performance review cycle for 2013-2014 ends with the annual review due on September 30, 2014. Subsequent review cycles will end September 30th of each year. It is recommended that raters complete the annual review by mid-September to allow for processing and approvals.

Q. When will I receive my individual performance plan (IPP)?

A. All non-probationary employees must have a completed individual performance plan with work outcomes written using the S.M.A.R.T. formula by December 15, 2013.

Q. When should I expect to have my Annual Review discussion?

A. Employees on the standard review cycle must receive an annual review of their performance prior to the cycle-end due date of September 30th. The review may be completed up to 90 days prior to the due date as long as the rater has conducted an individual performance planning discussion and two (2) interim review discussions with the employee during the review cycle. In order to receive an annual review, there must be a minimum of 30 days between each procedural step for the employee to perform to the expected work outcomes.

Q. I heard that "*no one may receive a rating of outstanding.*" Is this correct?

A. There appears to be some confusion about the ability of raters to assign review ratings beyond the valued level of performance. The rating scale ranges from unacceptable performance through outstanding performance. It is important to note that outstanding performance does not necessarily mean perfection. Advanced and outstanding performance must be achievable. While these ratings may not be commonly seen, it is certainly possible for an employee to exceed stated expectations (which are set at a valued and expected performance level) and earn a rating of advanced or even outstanding. To achieve a rating of advanced or outstanding, a solid performer would consistently go above and beyond the stated performance work outcomes. Performance warranting a rating of outstanding must also affect measurable improvements in organizational performance. When rating an employee's performance as advanced or outstanding, the rater must be prepared to accurately describe how the employee has exceeded stated performance expectations and demonstrated advanced or outstanding performance. As a reminder, the Appointing Authority must approve all "outstanding" performance ratings.

Q. How may a rating of valued performance be achieved?

A. Employers should have clear expectations of what an employee must do to meet the expected work outcomes of the job. The individual performance plan (IPP) should state these expected work outcomes and behavioral expectations using the S.M.A.R.T. formula (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time sensitive). The IPP's are to be written at the mid-point of the range which denotes solid and expected performance standards. Raters should explain to the employee the specific work outcomes and behaviors required to achieve this rating and that

performing at this level means that the employee is a valued and solid performer who is consistently meeting the performance expectations.

It is important that the rater hold a one-on-one discussion with the employee to explain the IPP and that work outcomes are written at the mid-point of the range.

Q. How may a rating above valued performance be achieved?

To achieve a rating of advanced or outstanding, the employee must go above and beyond the stated expected performance work outcomes. Although the individual performance plan (IPP) is written at the mid-point of the range or valued level of performance, if written using the S.M.A.R.T. formula, the rater should be able to discuss with the employee what a rating of advanced or outstanding might look like. However, what higher performance might look like should not be limited to what is discussed.

During the IPP discussion, the rater should explain to the employee that the purpose of leaving the advanced or outstanding specific work outcomes out of the plan in many cases is to encourage maximum performance and not limit the employee to what is in the plan. It is to encourage employees to perform at their full potential. Employees may find opportunities to go above and beyond the expected performance in ways the rater, or even the employee, cannot imagine at the time of the discussion. It is the rater's responsibility to recognize not just when the employee is not meeting the expectations of performance but to recognize when the employee does go above and beyond the expected work outcomes. The rater will note and discuss those work outcomes throughout the performance review cycle and reflect that performance on the interim reviews and annual performance review.

Note: The new definition of "outstanding performance" is that "work outcomes consistently exceed expected performance and affect measurable improvements in organizational performance."

Q. As a rater/supervisor, how do I know which form(s) I should use during the performance review process?

A. Whether in Edison or using the paper version of the forms, the documents you use during the performance review process might include: The probationary performance review form, probationary-flex performance review form, and the annual performance review form. For guidance on which forms to use for a specific employee, please contact your agency's human resources office.

Q. Some of my employees do not have access to a computer and Edison. Where do I find the paper version of the forms I need to use during the performance review process?

A. All forms for the Performance Management Program, including useful processing information and other tools, may be found at the following link:

<http://www.tn.gov/dohr/ogc-er/performance/perform.shtml>

Q. Do I use Edison to record executive service employees “individual performance plans” and other Performance Management documentation?

A. Yes. Beginning with the November 1st review cycle, Edison is set to record documentation for each procedural step including the individual performance plans, interim reviews and annual performance reviews for executive service employees just as it does for preferred service employees.

Q. What does S.M.A.R.T. stand for?

A. The S.M.A.R.T. formula acronym stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant (to the strategic objectives of the employee’s state agency), and time sensitive.

Q. Who must have an individual performance plan with work outcomes written using the S.M.A.R.T. formula?

A. All full-time employees, both executive service and preferred service are included in the Performance Management Program and require an individual performance plan with work outcomes written using the S.M.A.R.T. formula, two interim reviews and an annual review to be completed within each review cycle.

Q. At what performance level are expectations written in the individual performance plans (IPP)?

A. Expected performance standards and work outcomes in the IPP’s are written at the mid-point of the range. Valued performance denotes an employee who is consistently meeting the performance expectations of the job.

Q. How many interim reviews are required?

A. A minimum of two interim review discussions are required for each review cycle. In other words, a rater must provide each employee two separate feedback sessions on each work outcome statement during each review cycle prior to the annual review discussion. Of course, if more are needed, they may certainly be added. A rater may conduct as many additional interim review discussions as necessary.

Q. How soon after the individual performance plan (IPP) must I wait until I conduct the first interim review discussion?

A. The first interim review may not be conducted for at least 30 days from the IPP discussion to allow the employee the opportunity to perform to the expected performance standards and for the rater to observe the performance.

Q. Can the individual performance plan (IPP) be completed at the same time as an interim review?

A. No. Ideally, the entire review cycle will cover a 12-month timeframe and must include an IPP discussion, two interim review discussions, and an annual review discussion. However, there may be times when a shorter timeframe is required. For example, an employee may be given a new work assignment or have a change in supervision. In these situations, all procedural steps are still required in association with this change, but they may occur in a shortened time span of no less than 90 days. In all cases, the first interim review may not occur for at least 30 days from the IPP discussion.

Q. Can the last interim review be completed along with the annual review?

A. No. Ideally, the review cycle will cover a 12-month timeframe and must include an individual performance planning discussion, two interim review discussions and an annual review discussion. However, there may be times when a shorter timeframe is required. For example, an employee may be given a new work assignment or have a change in supervision. In these situations, all procedural steps are still required in association with this change, but they may occur in a shortened time span of no less than 90 days. In all cases, the second interim review must occur at least 30 days prior to the annual review discussion.

Q. What if the rater/supervisor changes during the course of the review cycle? Who is responsible for conducting the employee's annual performance review?

A. One of the following may occur:

1. The employee's current rater should conduct the review if the employee has been under the rater's supervision for no less than 90 days and within this time the rater has completed all of the procedural steps of the program, or
2. If the rater does not complete the review, the reviewer may step in and complete the process if the reviewer approved the individual performance plan, and the two interim reviews, or
3. If there are more than 90 days prior to the end of the current cycle, the new rater may complete all the procedural steps and complete the annual review. The procedural steps of the Performance Management Program are an individual performance planning discussion with the employee along with two interim reviews and an annual review.

Q. What if an employee disagrees with the rater's evaluation of performance?

A. The annual, probationary or probationary-flex review is based on the rater's observations of the prior year's performance. The employee may type comments into Edison prior to "acknowledging" the review discussion in Edison or when the employee does not have access to Edison, write comments on a paper form prior to

signing the paper annual, probationary or probationary-flex review. However, the employee's acknowledgement in Edison or signature on a paper document does not indicate agreement or disagreement with the review; but simply that it has been provided to and discussed with the employee. For more information, raters and employees may contact their agency's human resources office to discuss further if needed.

Q. What does the rater do after all acknowledgements of an annual, probationary or probationary-flex performance review are complete?

A. After all required individuals have reviewed and acknowledged the annual, probationary, or probationary-flex review document, the designated rater **must** go back into Edison and click the "complete" button under "Current Documents" to close the performance review for the performance cycle. The completion status data in Edison is a metric for which each rater, reviewer and agency is being held accountable. The timing of the completion process impacts many factors such as the established metrics, and the State's overall objective of achieving a higher level of customer service satisfaction.

Q. How are the overall performance review results and reports used?

A. Performance review results and reports are used to provide a formal record of employee performance for a specific period of time. This record may provide support for various performance related administrative actions affecting the employee such as determining promotions, demotions, transfers, dismissals, reduction in force and salary adjustments.

Q. Who is the contact for additional questions regarding the performance review process?

A. For an employee, the first point of contact for questions regarding the performance review process is your immediate supervisor. For a supervisor/rater, the first point of contact for questions is the reviewer or the agency's Performance Management Coordinator.